



U.S. traffic deaths dip in Q2 but still high as pandemic eases



Emergency crews work the scene of a fatal crash in Campbell County, Ky., Jan. 25, 2020.
Associated Press

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U.S. traffic deaths dip in Q2 but still high as pandemic eases

By TOM KRISHER and HOPE YEN

Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — The number of people killed on U.S. roadways fell slightly from April through June, the first decline in two years as pandemic-era reckless driving appeared to ease. But the government says the number of deaths remains at a crisis level.

Estimates from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration show that 20,175 people died in crashes from January through June, a 0.5% increase over the same period last year.

Yet the second-quarter decline ended a string of seven straight quarterly increases that began in the summer of 2020 with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The agency estimated that 10,590 people died this year on roadways from April to June, nearly 5% fewer than the same period a year ago.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said while deaths may be declining, they are still at levels that require urgent action. "These deaths are preventable, not inevitable, and we should act accordingly," he said in a statement. NHTSA Acting Administrator Ann Carlson told a group of state safety officials Monday that she hopes the recent decline is the begin-



Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg speaks at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, Wednesday, Sept. 14, 2022.

Associated Press

ning of a downward trend, but that the number of deaths remains unacceptable. "That is not the new normal we want," she told the Governors Highway Safety Association.

Fatalities began to rise two years ago when roads were largely empty due to stay-at-home orders in many states. With less traffic, speeds increased as did reckless and impaired driving, leading to a record spike in deaths last year. Many people weren't wearing seat belts, the government said.

Carlson said that because the estimates for

this year are early, the agency doesn't have specifics about why fatalities dropped. Agency estimates are typically close to actual numbers, which won't be released until later in the year.

There also was a small second-quarter drop in the traffic death rate per 100 million miles driven, from 1.34 in the second quarter of 2021, to 1.27 this year, Carlson said.

Auto safety advocates welcomed the dip but said there is more the Biden administration can be doing to reduce traffic fatalities.

For many months now,

crashes have declined even as deaths have surged, suggesting reckless driving that could now be declining as offices reopen and more cars return to the road, said Michael Brooks, executive director of the nonprofit Center for Auto Safety.

"What it may be is that we're seeing an easing of some of the issues that were caused by the pandemic — speeding, open roads, risky driving issues," Brooks said. "Traffic is returning to normal, the roads aren't as empty as they were."

"The fact is the fatality rate is still very, very high," he

said. "There is a lot that remains to be done."

Buttigieg earlier this year unveiled a national strategy aimed at reversing the trend of rising deaths, including new federal guidance and billions in grants under President Joe Biden's infrastructure law over the next two years to spur states and localities to lower speed limits and embrace safer road design. But auto safety groups say the Biden administration has remained slow to act in other areas, such as rule-making to mandate automatic emergency braking in all passenger vehicles as required under the 2021 infrastructure law.

"I think it's premature to be hopeful about the slight dip in fatalities especially considering the tremendous loss that we've experienced over the last couple years," said Cathy Chase, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety.

"We do know good safety systems, if implemented, will prevent many crashes," she said.

Nearly 43,000 people were killed on U.S. roads last year, the highest number in 16 years as Americans returned to the roads. The 10.5% jump over 2020 numbers was the largest percentage increase since NHTSA began its fatality data collection system in 1975. □



Carlos Munoz reaches out to hug Larkin Stallings of Vineyard Haven, Mass., as the immigrants prepare to leave St. Andrews in Edgartown, Mass., Friday, Sept. 16, 2022.

Associated Press

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The number of Venezuelans, Cubans and Nicaraguans taken into custody at the U.S. border with Mexico

soared in August as migrants from Mexico and traditional sending countries were stopped less frequently, authorities said Monday. U.S. authorities

U.S. migration from Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua soars in August

stopped migrants from Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua about 56,000 times last month, up from 49,826 times in July and 23,141 times in August 2021, according to administration officials. At the same time, fewer migrants were stopped from Mexico and the Central American "Northern Triangle" countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras for a third straight month.

Overall, migrants were stopped about 203,000 times. They were stopped

199,976 times on the U.S. border with Mexico in July and 213,593 times in August 2021. The growing numbers from Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua, are the latest sign of rapidly changing migration flows as U.S. authorities wrestle with unusually large influxes. While no single reason can be pinpointed, it is extremely challenging for the U.S. to expel migrants from those countries under a pandemic-era rule known as Title 42, which U.S. officials invoke to

deny a chance at seeking asylum on grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19. U.S. relations with all three countries are deeply strained, making it difficult to impossible to send them home.

Mexico agrees to accept migrants expelled under Title 42 if they are from Guatemala, Honduras or El Salvador, in addition to Mexico. While the rule applies to all nationalities in theory, people from those four countries are most affected. □

U.S. contractor freed by Taliban in swap for drug trafficker

By ERIC TUCKER and RAHIM FAIEZ

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An American contractor held hostage in Afghanistan for more than two years has been released in exchange for a convicted Taliban drug lord jailed in the United States, the White House said Monday, announcing a rare success in U.S.-Taliban talks since the militant group took power a little more than a year ago.

Mark Frerichs, a Navy veteran who had spent more than a decade in Afghanistan as a civilian contractor, was abducted in January 2020 and is believed to have been held since then by the Taliban-linked Haqqani network. He was traded for Bashir Noorzai, a Taliban associate convicted of heroin trafficking conspiracy who had spent 17 years behind bars before his release Monday.

The exchange is one of the most significant prisoner swaps to take place under the Biden administration, coming five months after a deal with Russia that resulted in the release of Marine veteran Trevor Reed. Though his case has received less public attention than those of other Americans held abroad, including WNBA star Brittney Griner and corporate security executive Paul Whelan who are both held in Russia and whose relatives met with President Joe Biden on Friday. U.S. officials said the deal for Frerichs was the culmination of months of quiet negotiations.

Those discussions gained new momentum in June when Biden granted Noorzai relief from his life sentence, setting the stage for what one administration official described as a "very narrow window of opportunity this month" to carry out the deal.

Biden said in a statement released by the White House, "Bringing the negotiations that led to Mark's freedom to a successful resolution required difficult decisions, which I did not take lightly."

Frerichs, 60, had been working on civil engineering projects at the time of

ly to us," said a statement from the sister, Charlene Cakora.

middle men who moved their drugs outside Afghanistan.



This undated photo provided to The AP shows Mark Frerichs, a U.S. veteran and civilian contractor held more than 2 years in Afghanistan by the Taliban.

Associated Press

his Jan. 31, 2020, abduction in Kabul.

He's believed to have been lured into a meeting to discuss a new project and then transported to Khost, a stronghold of the Taliban-linked Haqqani network near the border with Pakistan.

He was last seen in a video posted last spring by The New Yorker in which he appeared in traditional Afghan clothing and pleaded for his release. He was accompanied Monday by the administration's special presidential envoy for hostage affairs and was in stable health, a U.S. official said. His ultimate destination was not immediately clear.

A sister of Frerichs, who is from Lombard, Illinois, thanked U.S. officials who helped secure her brother's release.

"I am so happy to hear that my brother is safe and on his way home to us. Our family has prayed for this each day of the more than 31 months he has been a hostage. We never gave up hope that he would survive and come home safe-

Noorzai, at the time of his 2005 arrest, hardly seemed an ideal recipient for presidential clemency. He'd been designated on a list reserved for some of the world's most prolific drug traffickers, and was prosecuted in federal court in New York on charges that accused him of owning opium fields in Kandahar province and relying on a network of distributors who sold the heroin.

When he was sentenced to life imprisonment, the then-top federal prosecutor in Manhattan said Noorzai's "worldwide narcotics network supported a Taliban regime that made Afghanistan a breeding ground for international terrorism."

The deal underscored the two sides to the Taliban's approach to illegal drugs. In April, they announced a ban on harvesting the poppies that produce opium for making heroin an order that also outlawed the manufacture and transportation of narcotics. However, during the years-long Taliban insurgency, they reportedly made millions of dollars taxing farmers and

A senior administration official who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the administration said that the U.S. government had now determined that Noorzai's release would "not materially change any risk to Americans or fundamentally alter the contours of the drug trade there." Officials also took into account that Noorzai had spent 17 years in prison, and said that it became clear from negotiations that releasing him was the key to getting Frerichs home.

At a press conference Monday, Noorzai expressed gratitude at seeing his "mujahedeen brothers" a reference to the Taliban in Kabul.

"I pray for more success of the Taliban," he added. "I hope this exchange can lead to peace between Afghanistan and America, because an American was released and I am also free now."

Even before their takeover of Afghanistan in August last year, the Taliban had demanded the U.S. release Noorzai in exchange for Fr-

erichs.

But there had been little public indication of Washington proceeding along those lines.

Eric Lebson, a former U.S. government national security official who had been advising Frerichs family, said in a statement that "everything about this case has been an uphill fight." He criticized the Trump administration for having given away "our leverage to get Mark home quickly by signing a peace accord with the Taliban without ever having asked them to return Mark first."

"Mark's family then had to navigate two administrations, where many people viewed Mark's safe return as an impediment to their plans for Afghanistan," the statement said.

The collapse of the Western-backed Afghan government and takeover by the Taliban in August 2021 raised additional concern that any progress in negotiations could be undone or that Frerichs could be forgotten. But his name was invoked last month when Biden was said by his advisers to have pressed officials to consider any risk posed to Frerichs by the drone strike in Afghanistan that killed al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The Taliban-appointed foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, hailed the exchange Monday as the start of a "new era" in U.S.-Taliban relations and the opening of a "new door for talks."

U.S. officials were more circumspect. Though it does not recognize the Taliban government, the U.S. does have interests at stake in Afghanistan and will continue to engage with the Taliban in addressing the hunger and humanitarian crisis gripping the country, administration officials said Monday.

But officials say they remain concerned about whether the Taliban are committed to fighting terrorism and by the exclusion of girls from high schools there, an issue that drew a United Nations reprimand on Sunday. □

'Serial' case: Adnan Syed released, conviction tossed

By BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — A Baltimore judge on Monday ordered the release of Adnan Syed after overturning Syed's conviction for the 1999 murder of Hae Min Lee a case that was chronicled in the hit podcast "Serial." At the behest of prosecutors, Circuit Court Judge Melissa Phinn ordered that Syed's conviction be vacated as she approved the release of the now-41-year-old who has spent more than two decades behind bars.

Phinn ruled that the state violated its legal obligation to share evidence that could have bolstered Syed's defense. She ordered Syed to be placed on home detention with GPS location monitoring. The judge also said the state must decide whether to seek a new trial date or dismiss the case within 30 days.

"All right Mr. Syed, you're free to join your family," Phinn said as the hearing ended.

Syed has always maintained his innocence. His case captured the attention of millions in 2014 when the debut season of "Serial" focused on Lee's killing



Adnan Syed enters Courthouse East prior to a hearing on Feb. 3, 2016, in Baltimore.

Associated Press

and raised doubts about some of the evidence prosecutors had used, inspiring countless dinner table debates about Syed's innocence or guilt.

Last week, prosecutors filed a motion saying that a lengthy investigation conducted with the defense had uncovered new evidence that could undermine the 2000 conviction of Syed, Lee's ex-boyfriend. "I understand how difficult this is, but we need to make sure we hold the correct person account-

able," assistant state's attorney Becky Feldman told the judge as she described various details from the case that undermine the decades-old conviction, including flawed cellphone data, unreliable witness testimony and a potentially biased detective. Syed was serving a life sentence after he was convicted of strangling 18-year-old Lee, whose body was found buried in a Baltimore park.

The investigation "revealed undisclosed and newly-

developed information regarding two alternative suspects, as well as unreliable cell phone tower data," State's Attorney Marilyn Mosby's office said in a news release last week. The suspects were known persons at the time of the original investigation, but weren't properly ruled out nor disclosed to the defense, said prosecutors, who declined to release information about the suspects, due to the ongoing investigation.

Prosecutors said they

weren't asserting that Syed is innocent, but they lacked confidence "in the integrity of the conviction" and recommended he be released on his own recognition or bail. The state's attorney's office had said if the motion were granted it would effectively put Syed in a new trial status, vacating his convictions, while the case remained active. Syed was led into the crowded courtroom in handcuffs Monday. Wearing a white shirt with a tie, he sat next to his attorney. His mother and other family representatives were in the room, as was Mosby.

In 2016, a lower court ordered a retrial for Syed on grounds that his attorney, Cristina Gutierrez, who died in 2004, didn't contact an alibi witness and provided ineffective counsel.

But after a series of appeals, Maryland's highest court in 2019 denied a new trial in a 4-3 opinion. The Court of Appeals agreed with a lower court that Syed's legal counsel was deficient in failing to investigate an alibi witness, but it disagreed that the deficiency prejudiced the case. The court said Syed waived his ineffective counsel claim. □

Rain helps increase containment of huge California wildfire

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A major storm that battered western Alaska over the weekend churned through Northern California on Monday after bringing early-season snow to mountains and dropping rain that helped firefighters increase their containment of a huge wildfire.

No growth was reported on the 119-square-mile (308-square-kilometer) Mosquito Fire in the Sierra Nevada foothills northeast of Sacramento. The blaze was 38% contained Monday after downpours allowed sheriff's officials in two counties to lift or downgrade some evacuation orders. It's the state's largest wildfire of the year so far.

More rain was expected, which fire spokesman Scott

McLean called a mixed blessing for firefighters.

"It did help a bit to stifle that aggressive fire," McLean said. "But we're going to have new safety issues

now with all the mud that's out there. And the ground moisture could cause some of those damaged trees to fall over."

Lingering showers over the

Mosquito Fire will increase the risk of ash and mud flows, the National Weather Service said. To the northwest, localized flooding and mudslides were reported in parts of the Coast Range scarred from a massive wildfire two years ago. Snow and ice in the eastern Sierra Nevada on Sunday led officials to close State Route 108 high up over the Sonora Pass, the California Department of Transportation said. The pass reopened Monday.

To the north, roads remained closed at Lassen Volcanic National Park "due to expected snow accumulation," but the park's main entrances was open, officials said in a statement. Scattered rain was expected throughout the day from

Sacramento north to Redding, forecasters said. The weather service cautioned drivers that roads could be slick and commutes could take longer.

Heavy rain fell Sunday across Marin, Napa and Sonoma counties north of San Francisco, with more than an inch (2.5 centimeters) recorded over 24 hours in some mountain areas, the National Weather Service said. Flood advisories for the Bay Area expired early Monday.

Bands of rain stretched south into Santa Cruz County and along the Central Coast, where Highway 1 was briefly closed because of flooding in Big Sur. Precipitation wasn't expected to reach Southern California. □



Rain drenches streets in Chinatown in San Francisco, on Sunday, Sept. 18, 2022.

Associated Press

Baltic nations close borders to Russians over Ukraine war

By **MONIKA SCISLOWSKA**

Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania closed their borders Monday to most Russian citizens in response to the wide domestic support in Russia for the war in Ukraine.

Under the coordinated travel ban, Russians wishing to travel to the Baltic countries as tourists or for business, sports or cultural purposes will not be allowed in even if they hold valid visas for the European Union's checks-free Schengen Area.

The prime ministers of the three Baltic nations and Poland agreed earlier this month to stop admitting Russian citizens, saying the move would protect the security of the four European Union member nations.

"Russia is an unpredictable and aggressive state. Three-quarters of its citizens support the war. It is unacceptable that people who support the war can freely travel around the world, into Lithuania, the EU," Lithuanian Interior Minister Agne Bilotaite said Monday. "Such support for hostilities can pose threats to the security of our country and the EU as a whole," she added.

The ban includes exceptions for humanitarian reasons, family members of EU



People visit the area of tripoint marking the place where borders of Poland, Lithuania and Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast meet, in Zerdziny, Poland, July 7, 2022.

citizens, Russian dissidents, serving diplomats, transportation employees and Russians with residence permits or long-stay national visas from the 26 Schengen countries.

Poland's interior minister, Mariusz Kaminski, signed regulations Monday that will put the central European nation's war-related ban on Russian travelers into effect on Sept. 26. Poland, which borders Russia's Kaliningrad exclave, still has tight restrictions on foreign visitors remaining from the COVID-19 pan-

demic.

In the eastern Polish city of Bialystok, a member of the Russian Culture and Education Association in Poland said a new ban would have hit much harder if the pandemic restrictions had not already largely limited travel with Russia.

"After more than two years of restrictions, we see no prospects for an improvement, and that is the worst part," Andrzej Romanczuk, a Polish citizen, told The Associated Press.

He said regions on both sides of Poland's border

with Kaliningrad will be hit economically because border traffic there drives local trade. Russians also shop in Polish cities like Warsaw or Krakow.

Over 65,000 Russians have crossed into Poland this year, similar to the same period last year but 10 times smaller than before the pandemic.

The Lithuanian Interior Ministry said 11 Russian citizens were stopped from entering that country starting at midnight.

Most were trying to enter by land from Kaliningrad or

Associated Press

from Belarus. No incidents were reported.

Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu told the Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat that Russian travelers posed security concerns because "we know that Russian spies have used fake IDs and carried out various activities in Europe using tourist visas."

Estonia, a nation of 1.3 million, has registered hundreds of thousands of border crossings by Russian citizens since the start of Russia's war on Ukraine.

The Baltic countries cannot, however, stop Russian citizens from entering via another Schengen nation. They want similar travel restrictions to be taken by all 27 EU member states.

The EU already has banned air travel from Russia after it invaded Ukraine. But before the ban, Russians could still travel by land to Estonia and apparently were then taking flights to other European destinations.

At a EU summit last month, the bloc's 27 members were divided over whether to slap a broad visa ban on Russian citizens, torn between a desire to ramp up pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin and concerns about punishing ordinary Russians who may not even support his war on Ukraine. □

Storm hits southwest Japan, leaves 1 dead, another missing

By **YURI KAGEYAMA**

Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A tropical

storm slammed southwestern Japan with rainfall and winds Monday, leaving one

person dead and another missing, as it swerved north toward Tokyo.

Residential streets were flooded with muddy water from rivers, and swathes of homes lost power after Typhoon Nanmadol made landfall in the Kyushu region Sunday then weakened to a tropical storm.

A man was found dead early Monday in his car that was sunk in water on a farm, said Yoshiharu Maeda, a city hall official in charge of disasters at Miyakonojo, Miyazaki prefecture. Separately, one person was missing after a cottage was caught in a landslide, according to a Miyazaki pre-

fectural official.

Nanmadol has sustained winds blowing at 108 kilometers per hour (67 mph) and gusts up to 162 kilometers (100 miles) per hour, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency. Tens of thousands of people spent the night at gymnasiums and other facilities in a precautionary evacuation of vulnerable homes. More than 60 people were injured, including those who fell down in the rain or were hit by shards of glass, according to Japanese media reports.

Torrential winds smashed signboards. A construction crane snapped and

a window at a pachinko parlor was shattered in Kagoshima city, southwestern Japan. Bullet trains and airlines suspended service. Warnings were issued about landslides and swelling rivers. Convenience store chains and delivery services temporarily shuttered in southwestern Japan, while some highways were closed and people had some problems with cell phone connections.

The storm is forecast to continue dumping rain on its northeasterly path over Japan's main island of Honshu, before moving over Tokyo and then northeastern Japan. □



Rescuers conduct a search operation at the site of a landslide in Mimata, Miyazaki Prefecture, southern Japan, Monday Sept. 19, 2022.

Associated Press

Iran faces U.S. in international court over asset seizure

By MOLLY QUELL

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands

(AP) — Iran told the United Nations' highest court on Monday that Washington's confiscation of some \$2 billion in assets from Iranian state bank accounts to compensate bombing victims was an attempt to destabilize the Iranian government and a violation of international law.

In 2016, Tehran filed a suit at the International Court of Justice after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled money held in Iran's central bank could be used to compensate the 241 victims of a 1983 bombing of a U.S. military base in Lebanon believed linked to Iran.

Hearings in the case opened Monday in the Hague-based court, starting with Iran's arguments. The proceedings will continue with opening statements by Washington on Wednesday. At stake are \$1.75 billion in bonds, plus accumulated interest, belonging to the Iranian state but held in a Citibank account in New York. In 1983, a suicide bomber in a truck loaded with military-grade explosives attacked U.S.



Rescue workers sift through the rubble of the U.S. Marine base in Beirut in Oct. 23, 1983 following a massive bomb blast that destroyed the base and killed 241 American servicemen.

Associated Press

Marine barracks in Beirut, killing 241 American troops and 58 French soldiers.

While Iran long has denied being involved, a U.S. District Court judge found Tehran responsible in 2003. That ruling said Iran's ambassador to Syria at the time called "a member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and instructed him to instigate the Marine barracks bombing." The international court ruled it had jurisdiction to hear the case

in 2019, rejecting an argument from the U.S. that its national security interests superseded the 1955 Treaty of Amity, which promised friendship and cooperation between the two countries. "The freedom of navigation and commerce guaranteed by the treaty have been gravely breached," Tavakol Habibzadeh, head of international legal affairs for Iran, told the 14-judge panel Monday.

A 2012 U.S. law ordered the

bank to hand over the assets to the families of those killed in the Beirut bombing. A U.S. court concluded the attack, which struck barracks for service members conducting peacekeeping operations during Lebanon's civil war, was carried out by Iranian agents supported by the Hezbollah militant group.

Iran claims it was not involved in the attack. Habibzadeh said Monday that the U.S. has created

an "industry of litigation" against Iran and Iranian companies in an effort to undermine the regime. The seizure was just one maneuver "aiming to destabilize Iran and the Iranian government," Habibzadeh said. The two countries have had no diplomatic relations since the 1979 U.S. Embassy takeover by militant students in Tehran.

The pair have a second case pending before the ICJ over the same obscure treaty. Tehran filed an unrelated complaint with the court in 2018 after former president Donald Trump re-imposed sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program. In response, the U.S. withdrew from the treaty entirely.

The hearings come as Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi headed on Monday to New York, where he will be speaking to the U.N. General Assembly later this week.

Tehran and Washington have traded written responses in recent months on a roadmap that would see sanctions lifted against Iran in exchange for restricting its rapidly advancing nuclear program. □

Beirut protesters demand release of bank heist detainees

By BASSEM MROUE

Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Protesters scuffled with Lebanese security forces Monday outside the Justice Ministry in Beirut, demanding the release of two people arrested last week during a bank

heist.

The clash came as a delegation from the International Monetary Fund held meetings in Beirut with officials over the country's economic meltdown and the limited steps taken by the government to pull Leb-

anon out of the worst economic crisis in its modern history. The crisis is rooted in decades of corruption and mismanagement.

The Lebanese government has implemented few of the IMF's demands from a staff level agreement reached with the IMF in April. It lists five "key pillars" that should be implemented, including restructuring the financial sector, implementing fiscal reforms, the proposed restructuring of external public debt, anti-corruption and anti-money laundering efforts.

The agreement also demanded that the country's 14 largest banks be held up as a standard for work on restructuring the sector since they control about 80% of the market. The smaller banks that have

problems should be taken over by bigger lenders.

Anger with local lenders who have been imposing informal capital controls including limits on ATM withdrawals for nearly three years has increased in recent weeks, with some depositors storming bank branches and taking their trapped savings by force. Monday's protest outside the Justice Ministry demanded the release of Abdul-Rahman Zakariya and Mohammed Rustom, who have been held since Wednesday after they broke into a bank branch and helped a depositor take her trapped savings to pay for her sister's cancer treatment.

They joined Sali Hafez, who used a toy pistol to demand \$13,000 from her

trapped savings account. Hafez, who has been in hiding, has said she repeatedly visited the bank to ask for her money and was told she could only receive \$200 a month in Lebanese pounds. On Friday depositors, including one armed with a hunting rifle, broke into at least five banks to demand their trapped savings, the largest number of such incidents in one day. The banks, citing security concerns, closed all branches for three days starting Monday.

At one point on Monday, dozens of protesters tried to storm the Justice Ministry before stopping after they removed a metal gate. There are concerns that if the two men are not released, protests could intensify. □



Protesters try to remove a gate to the Justice Palace during a demonstration demanding the release of two people arrested last week during a bank robbery, in Beirut, Lebanon, Monday, Sept. 19, 2022.

Associated Press

Plenipotentiary minister of Aruba in the Netherlands present at farewell reception for Henk Brons

THE HAGUE – At Pulchri Studio take place a farewell reception for Henk Brons, who is retiring as General Director of Kingdom Relations at the Dutch ministry of Internal Affairs and Kingdom Relations (BZK).

Among those present was also the interim Plenipotentiary minister of Aruba, Mr. Ady Thijsen. On this occasion, Mr. Thijsen thanked Mr. Brons – in the name of the government of Aruba – for the cooperation received while he was director at BZK.

The program consisted of the presentation of the book 'Ongemak' written by Gert Oostindie and Wouter Veenendaal, followed by



a discussion with participation of Ank Bijleveld, Andre Bosman, Francio Guadeloupe, Valika Smeulders and Glenn Thode.

Henk Brons started 43 years ago as a political commentator for the newspaper Het Vrije Volk (The Free People). His career as a civil servant began as a director of information for the ministry of Education, and then went to RVD, the bureau of information of the government of the Netherlands.

Since 2015, Henk Brons served in the function of representative of the Netherlands to Curaçao, Aruba and Sint Maarten. Three years later he was appointed as General Director for Kingdom Relations at the BZK ministry. □

Photos by photographer Nico van der Ven.

Prime minister attends Opening of General Assembly of the United Nations at New York

ORANJESTAD – This week, prime minister of Aruba, Evelyn Wever-Croes together with other ministers of the Kingdom of the Netherlands have travelled to New York for the opening of the General Assembly of the United Nations. During the week there will be various meetings programmed, particularly with General Secretary Mr. Antonio Guterres where there will be opportunities for each island to bring forward their concerns.

For Aruba, these meetings are extremely important because our island is in the recovery phase after Covid. The United Nations is in favor of giving a remission or subsidy to countries who had to take on huge loans during the pandemic, and this point will also be brought forward during the meeting.

Education

The prime minister was also invited to attend, in the name of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the summit on education. This is a United Nations meeting with various countries in

order to analyze the new challenges on the field of education in general in the development of countries after Covid. The Prime minister will speak during this summit and tell how Aruba is dealing with these challenges.

Gender equality

The prime minister will also meet with UN Women, an agency of the United Nations that is helping Aruba with gender policy, which is the policy of women's rights in Aruba.

For this topic, there will be some conferences organized in which the prime minister will speak and will try to find funds to help Aruba approach this subject more efficiently.

Everyone was affected during the Covid pandemic, but children, the elder and women are those who were affected the most. For this reason it is important to reflect on the role of women in society in order to avoid the risk that they are going to be left even further behind in development, losing the battle and

sacrifice of women of past generations.

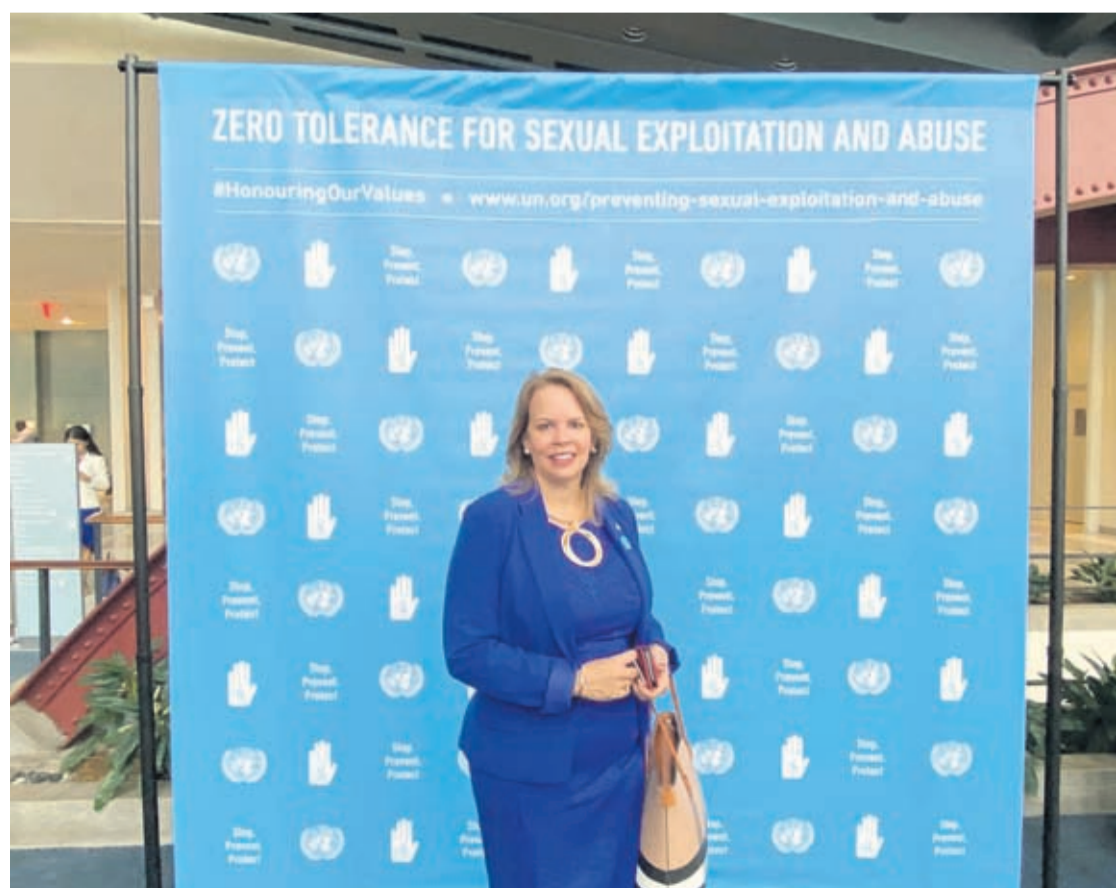
International Relations

Another meeting that the prime minister will attend is with the State Department, which deals with international relations. During this meeting the subject of Venezuela will be dis-

cussed, together with the refinery of Aruba and other important topics.

Finally, the prime minister was also invited by the Clinton Foundation, which is the foundation of ex-president of the United States, Bill Clinton with Hillary and Chelsea Clinton, who spoke about resilience.

These are some of the meetings and gatherings that are taking place this week in New York. During the week, the prime minister will continue extensively informing on each meeting and the achievements for Aruba during these meetings. □






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Some of Peru's Best Flavors are Firing up Palm Beach, Thanks to New Pop-Up Restaurant Blu Bar

Radisson **BLU**

ARUBA

Blu Aruba, Blu Bar is open daily from 5PM to 11PM.

Unwind with local prices and a singing angel

Blu Bar offers a nice selection of wines and each Wednesday you will only pay in Florins. The Dollar to Florin deals – 44% discount – on wine bottles start from 5PM every Wednesday. Now it gets even better because from 7PM you can enjoy the amazing voice of local singer Amy Sorinio. The all-round performer has a unique voice and a great energy. She easily connects with her public and enchants you with jazz, easy listening, pop, soul, Latin... name a style and she can do it. Her passion led her travelling all around the world and you will feel her experience and genuine love for music.



PALM BEACH, ARUBA – Radisson Blu Aruba, located in Palm Beach, celebrated the soft opening of its new Peruvian pop-up restaurant last week. The unique and stylish Blu Bar: A Peruvian-inspired restaurant that offers everything that you love about Peruvian fusion cuisine, but with a modern twist.

Diners can expect to find many seafood-centric dishes including popular Peruvian eats such as Ceviches and Tiraditos. Some of the highlights from the dinner menu include mouthwatering dishes such as the team's favorite: cowboy pork glazed with blackberries jam served with 'fufu', local fish on a sugar snap peas puree, NY strip with Peruvian chimichurri, and 8 hours slow-cooked beef brisket; all dishes enhanced by a modern twist on flavors and presentation. The Executive chef and his team are clearly dedicated to making you come back presenting you tasty appetizers or full entrée offerings.

As for libations, the beverage team built an equal innovative menu with a detailed selection of stunning wines and signature cocktails to pair with each dish.

The next hot spot in Palm Beach

The pop-up is the only spot for Peruvian dining in Palm Beach and offers both indoor dining with panoramic floor to ceiling windows, and outdoor seating with a picturesque view of the resort's luxurious pool and lush gardens. The upscale atmosphere, rich in original architectural details absolute perfect location for dining with loved ones, clients, and business associates. At night, the restaurant's chic bar is a lively place to gather with friends for cocktails and cozy vibes.

One thing must be said: the hotel's staff makes a difference. Real smiles, real attention and real enthusiasm is what you encounter. Here we are experiencing something new, and a new place has new vibes, for you to discover. Radisson Blu Aruba invites locals and visitors alike to enjoy a Peruvian culinary experience they will never forget. Located in the heart of Radisson

Reservations are not required, and walk-ins are welcome. Go and find out why Blu Bar is the next hotspot for a bite, a drink or more. □

Radisson Blu Aruba
J.E. Irausquin Boulevard 97-A
Palm Beach, Aruba
Tel.: +297 526 5000

Email:
concierge@radissonbluaruba.com



CLIMATE MEETS FASHION

A synergy between Art Fashion, DirectieNatuur en MilieusupportingActNow of United Nations

SAN NICOLAS/ARTFASHION2022 - 2022 marks the introduction of a new era for the most anticipated fashion event of the year, Art Fashion. This year Art Fashion will partner up with DNM (DirectieNatuur en Milieu) and together they are supporting The United Nations in the ActNow Climate Campaign, with the aim of raising awareness and promoting lasting behavior change when it comes to fashion choices. This project is co-founded by the European Union, highlighting the SDG's which are sustainable development goals.

The challenge, part of the ActNow Climate Campaign, aims to educate and encourage individual behavioral change, mainly by adjusting consumption patterns. Fast Fashion Industry is the second largest contributor to Climate Change; therefore, this Fashion Event will be a direct invitation to the Aruban community to step up and act now their climate actions and join the movement to build a better word.

Designers, such as Elisa Lejeuz, will present an awe-inspiring compilation of scarves with designs depicting a Totem Ode to the Gods. The original Aruba Rock drawings are one of the special patterns of her designs where only silk-worms and water were involved in the process. Her collection support Climate Actions.

For the first time, Aruba will host a group of young performances from the sister Island of Bonaire, "Mala Mucha", showing their peculiar style and bringing their message about animal extinction, in the form of songs that will impact and flow in their designs.

Greenhouse Gas (GhG) emission and global species extinctions (trees and important animals) cause warmer temperatures over time that are chang-



ing weather patterns and disrupting the normal balance of nature. This poses many risks to human beings and all other forms of life on Earth. The designers of sister island Curacao illustrates shades of orange representing the (scorching) temperatures and life as they know it on earth.

Water, what is gold surrounding our Island and most essential to sustain life on Earth will be presented in a flow of jewels by Atelier Doree by Hendrik and Judith Uiterloo from Surinam.

More than 10 participating local and international designers has thought through their involvement in getting the message across through their art and designs. And what more special place, than the mystical and authentic artistic streets of San Nicolas.

Art Fashion will bring designers together to raise awareness of climate change on the Island of Aruba, produce events as Climate meet Fashion talks (September 23, 2022) and Climate meets Fashion Sales (September 24, 2022).

ActNow is the United Nations Campaign for individual action on Climate Change and sustainability. Together forming a perfect

alliance to help people make better choices that will contribute to less harmful environmental effects.

Art Fashion will take place Wednesday November 2nd, 2022 with a remarkable variety of music and designs, where the models not only walk the stage, strike the pose, sing and dance, but in their own magical way show that they do care about our planet, reinforcing the statement; there is NO PLANET B.

For more detailed information visit our website www.artfashion.com or call us at the ArtisA office at 5635904.



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From Defense training to actual deployment during storm Fiona



The hurricane relief exercise that Defense is holding in the Caribbean region from September 15 to September 27, has been temporarily changed to actual deployment on the Windward Islands. The local authorities of Saba and St. Eustatius have made a request to Defense to provide military assistance in connection with the passage of storm Fiona. A lot of rain and strong gusts of wind are expected, resulting in a high degree of expected damage and nuisance. During deployment, Defense acts together with local security partners.

Saba has asked the Ministry of Defense to support them in clearing areas and clearing roads. There is also a need for possible support with minor repairs, both before and after the storm passage. Saba has a limited infrastructure, which makes it important to clear roads quickly for the emergency services already present. More than 30 marines and a military nurse from the Royal Netherlands Navy are present.

Dutch soldiers will also provide military assistance on St. Eustatius in the form of possible emergency aid. Due to the expected rain and wind, there is a risk of damage to buildings and therefore also a poten-

tial danger for the inhabitants. What can become a particularly big problem on the island are mudslides, flooding and landslides. Here too,

Defense can make a difference with the marines already present and provide the island with possible emergency aid. Defense will provide an advisor for the disaster staff to ensure smooth cooperation between the local authorities and Defense. In addition, more than 30 marines will act in partnership with the police and the fire brigade where necessary to perform various tasks.

There is currently no concrete need for military assistance on Sint Maarten, but the units are ready to carry out any requests. If no deployment is required from Defense on Sint Maarten, the exercise program will be resumed. The soldiers to be deployed are already present on the islands because of training for providing emergency response to a hurricane passage, called the 'Windward Express'. When the situation permits, the units from Aruba, Curaçao and St. Maarten will resume (parts of) the training. Supporting the local authorities is one of the main tasks of Defense in the Caribbean Region. □

Players Choice Tours The Aruba Specialist



President Mr Guy Gemore founded in January 1990 Players Choice Tours and it is specializing in Aruba Vacations Held on Friday Evening their famous cocktail party with good food and cold drinks and cocktails for the Renaissance and Horizon Group at the Hilton Hotel.

The host of the party was Guy Gemore jr son on the President Guy Gemore and Heidi Belardo who has been with the company since it has been founded.

The Renaissance Group is a 55 and over, development in Manchester New Jersey.

A special thank you goes also to John and Cathy Chifullo and Larry Tagliani who was also part of the Players Choice Tours team. Here follows some pictures of that amazing night.

Thank You Players Choice Tours. □

Giles Maduro: The 'bee whisperer' of Aruba

ORANJESTAD – Around the world, bees are in danger, and Aruba is no exception. But this insect, indispensable for vegetation and nature in general has a big ally, and his name is Giles Maduro (33) of the Fundacion Proteha Abeha Aruba, FPAA.

Giles is known for getting beehives out of people's homes and rescuing these animals that contribute to pollination of plants including those that produce food. The interest that Giles Maduro has for bees began very early. He always liked nature, inspired primarily by his grandfather Sixto Maduro. Sixto, a fisherman, would regularly take his grandson into the mondi – Aruba's wilderness – to explore the local nature. And from the moment when Giles lost his grandfather, through the passing of the years, he felt himself called to become a protector of bees, to ensure that they do not disappear from the nature on Aruba, and at the same time, to ensure that Aruba's nature is not lost. "My grandfather would take us into the mondi and teach us about herbs that people use as medicine", he said.

In 2007, even though Giles was very young, he decided to focus on working with bees. Before that, his interest was in art and photography. But why bees? "I felt that I had to do something for these insects. From a young age I was searching for a purpose. If I do a job, I have to do it with love." Some people feel themselves called to conservation, for example of rhinoceros. The fight of activists to try to save the various species of rhinoceros inspired the teenager, who began educate himself about the habitat, behavior and needs of bees in Aruba. "They are the main key for nature around the world, and I take it very seriously."

When our reporter met with Giles Maduro, he had just removed a bee colony from a house, to then bring to a local farm that belongs to an elderly farmer. There he had the opportunity to talk to the gentleman, who wanted to tell him about his own work. It was another opportunity for Giles to learn from his elders and appreciate the work that goes into farming. And it is precisely here where bees have a very important role to play.

He taught himself from very early on how to rescue bee colonies which are under stress or have begun invading houses in Aruba. With



more inhabitants, more development, there is less mondi available for these insects. And with the climate becoming warmer and dryer, more and more bees are seeking refuge in residential areas. The result is that Giles is constantly active removing bee colonies in order to put them in a special box and bring them to a safe place.

Giles can be considered self-made. In any case, he finds all necessary information online and learns by himself. "I also took a course in Colombia, to learn more about bees and their life. When you start on your own, you don't know much about new developments. For example, in the past I used smoke in

the house to get the bees out. But nowadays I don't do it (as much) because I learned that smoke can burn their wings and even their eyes. So now that I work with bees, I know how to give them a better treatment."

Giles Maduro has two boxes of bees for himself. He doesn't have more because he lives in a residential neighborhood "and you cannot have a lot of boxes in a neighborhood, and sometimes bees go crazy". Giles doesn't get honey from the bees, because he doesn't want to interrupt the natural process of the bees. "They need the wax to eat." They make this for the colony to survive. But if he finds

a colony in somebody's house, that has already made wax, he takes the honey and brings some to the house's owner. "We sell that to raise funds for the foundation", Fundacion Proteha Abeha Aruba – Protect Bees Aruba Foundation.

Generally, bees are not aggressive. A new queen going out with her swarm is very calm, because they are all well fed. When you see a swarm of bees, mostly they are searching for a home. In that case, you can approach them without protection on your body or face. "But there are people who panic seeing a swarm of bees arriving at their home. It's a natural reaction. That's why we want to emphasize that when a swarm of bees approaches a home, just stay calm, because they are just going to rest. However, when a beehive has existed for a while and they have made wax already, you have a colony which becomes defensive. Then you need to be careful to not make a lot of noise, don't walk around with perfume or spray insecticide. All that can trigger the bees and make them aggressive." Thus it is recommended to remove all the wax, the queen and the bees from people's home. And how does Giles recognize the queen? "The bees dance in a circle. The bees gather around the queen, and the others begin to walk around the ball of bees to close it more narrowly. The queen emits a smell to call her bees, another smell to signal to attack, and for the bees to find food."

Many local farmers – known as cunukero – make boxes for bees to live on their land. Giles doesn't just free the bees anywhere, because the place needs to be green and fresh and removed from homes.

Bees are in danger because rain is not falling, there aren't a lot of plants with flowers, and the heat is intense. "We are finding hives that simply suffocated or fell into depression and they die."

These days it is extremely hot, which means more work, something that makes Giles happy. His ambition is to stabilize the bee population of Aruba, and afterwards, share his knowledge with the world.

To watch our video about beekeeping in Aruba, visit our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/arubatoday/videos/1138047229700004> or scan the QR code.



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

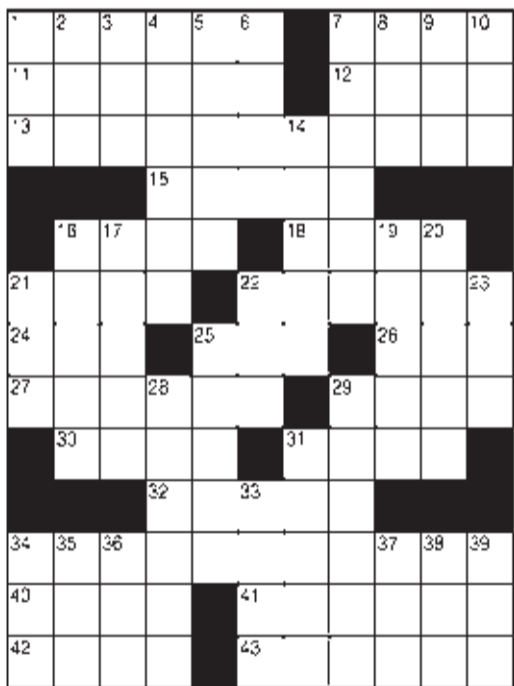
- 1 Chatty bird
- 7 Rural spread
- 11 Large lizard
- 12 Massage target
- 13 Builder
- 15 Island off Naples
- 16 Trade
- 18 Browser button
- 21 Fervor
- 22 Ship's kitchen
- 24 French friend
- 25 Dapper fellow
- 26 Wide shoe letters
- 27 Zodiac sign
- 29 Travel aids
- 30 Cease
- 31 Phoenix team
- 32 Lassos
- 34 Squeezing snake
- 40 Tot's scrape
- 41 One way to shop
- 42 Printed matter
- 43 Oozed

DOWN

- 1 Snapshot, briefly
- 2 In the past
- 3 Use the track
- 4 Knave
- 5 Like draft beer
- 6 Diamond cover
- 7 Spa offering
- 8 Drama division
- 9 Seven-teenth
- 10 Sea, to Simone
- 14 City-based
- 16 Convoy trucks
- 17 Jeans measure
- 19 Spotless
- 20 Maintains
- 21 Ray-gun sound
- 22 Neon or helium
- 23 "You bet!"
- 25 Train stop
- 28 Foundation garment
- 29 Brawn
- 31 Paris river
- 33 Debate group
- 34 Barracks bed
- 35 Need to pay
- 36 Disallow
- 37 Pointer
- 38 Low digit
- 39 Stop symbol



Yesterday's answer



9-20

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three I's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

9-20

CRYPTOQUOTE

TRJCPP GNT OYC O BUKKO.

ZVC ORPXC Y UP GCP. U IIR

JULC XUZVNTZ GNT. — MUJJ

ATYYOG

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: WHEN A PIRATE GROWS RICH ENOUGH, THEY MAKE HIM A PRINCE. — GEORGE R.R. MARTIN

Insider Q&A: Roy Bingham, CEO of cannabis research firm BDSA

By ALEX VEIGA

AP Business Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Colorado-based research firm BDSA projects legal marijuana sales in the U.S. will jump 8% this year to \$27 billion. Much of the increase is coming from states like Illinois and New Jersey that recently legalized cannabis sales for recreational use, according to BDSA. Those gains should offset slowing sales in more established legal marijuana markets, such as California, Washington and Colorado, according to a BDSA forecast released this week.

BDSA forecasts U.S. sales will reach \$42 billion in 2026. Adult recreational use of marijuana is legal in 19 states, while medical use is legal in 39 states.

BDSA Chief Executive Roy Bingham spoke to The Associated Press about the cannabis industry trends that shaped the firm's forecast.

Q: Why are some markets seeing sales growth, while others are slowing?

A: The industry is made up of a series of growth curves

for each state. In the case of some of the mature states, they are now at the flat or declining phase, largely because of price reductions. And in the case of the early stage markets like New Jersey, they're in the catching up very rapidly phase. And then you still have states like Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan that are seeing fairly strong growth. Combine that with markets that are going to

come on in the future when legalization takes place for either medical use or adult use, and you end up with our projection of \$42 billion by 2026. So, it's a tough time to be in the cannabis industry in California, for example, but it's a great time to be in the cannabis industry in Illinois, pretty good in Massachusetts, Michigan, and very exciting if you're in New Jersey or New York. □



This image provided by UPRAISE Public Relations shows Roy Bingham, chief executive officer of the cannabis research firm BDSA.

Associated Press

Europe's central bank to use climate scores as it buys bonds

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP)

— The European Central Bank said Monday that it will give corporations climate scores before it buys their bonds and intends to prioritize those doing more to reveal and reduce

greenhouse gas emissions, filling in details of its efforts to help Europe meet its environmental goals.

The Frankfurt, Germany-based central bank for the 19 countries that use the euro said it was taking the

step to support the European Union's climate goals. The companies' scores would measure progress in reducing past emissions, plans to reduce them in the future, and completeness of reporting the amount of greenhouse gases they are emitting. The ECB bought corporate bonds as part of its past economic stimulus efforts to lower longer-term interest rates.

Those programs have ended, with the bank now re-investing the proceeds of maturing bonds and using the climate scores in deciding on bond holdings. It says it will buy more from companies with better scores and in theory support their ability to borrow at lower rates. □



Sunflowers blossom in front of the European Central Bank, right, in Frankfurt, Germany, Monday, Sept. 5, 2022. The ECB governing council will meet on Thursday.

Associated Press

First public global database of fossil fuels launches

BY DREW COSTLEY
AP Science Writer

A first-of-its-kind database for tracking the world's fossil fuel production, reserves and emissions launches on Monday to coincide with climate talks taking place at the United Nations General Assembly in New York. The Global Registry of Fossil Fuels includes data from over 50,000 oil, gas and coal fields in 89 countries. That covers 75% of global reserves, production and emissions, and is available for public use, a first for a collection of this size.

Until now there has been private data available for purchase, and analysis of the world's fossil fuel usage and reserves. The International Energy Agency also maintains public data on oil, gas and coal, but it focuses on the demand for those fossil fuels, whereas this new database looks at what is yet to be burned. The registry was developed by Carbon Tracker, a nonprofit think tank that researches the energy transition's effect on financial markets, and the Global Energy Monitor, an organization that tracks a variety of energy projects around the globe.

Corporations, investors and scientists already have some level of access to private data on fossil fuels. Mark Campanale, founder



A flare burns at Venture Global LNG in Cameron, La., on April 21, 2022.

Associated Press

of Carbon Tracker, said he hopes the registry will empower groups to hold governments accountable, for example, when they issue licenses for fossil fuel extraction.

"Civil society groups have got to get more of a focus on what governments are planning to do in terms of license issuance, both for coal and oil and gas, and actually begin to challenge this permitting process," Campanale told The Associated Press.

The release of the database and an accompanying analysis of the collected data coincide with two critical sets of climate talks at the international level the U.N. General Assembly in New York beginning on September 13, and COP27

in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, in November. Data like what's being released in the registry could arm environmental and climate groups to pressure national leaders to agree to stronger policies that result in less carbon emissions.

And we're in dire need of carbon reductions, Campanale said. □

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Book ban efforts surging in 2022, library association says

By **HILLEL ITALIE**
AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The wave of attempted book banning and restrictions continues to intensify, the American Library Association reported Friday. Numbers for 2022 already approach last year's totals, which were the highest in decades. "I've never seen anything like this," says Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom. "It's both the number of challenges and the kinds of challenges. It used to be a parent had learned about a given book and had an issue with it. Now we see campaigns where organizations are compiling lists of books, without necessarily reading or even looking at them." The ALA has documented 681 challenges to books through the first eight months of this year, involving 1,651 different titles. In all of 2021, the ALA listed 729 challenges, directed at 1,579 books. Because the ALA relies on media accounts and reports from libraries, the actual number of challenges is likely far higher, the library as-



Amanda Darrow, director of youth, family and education programs at the Utah Pride Center, poses with books that have been the subject of complaints from parents in Salt Lake City on Dec. 16, 2021.

sociation believes. Friday's announcement is timed to Banned Books Week, which begins Sunday and will be promoted around the country through table displays, posters, bookmarks and stickers and through readings, essay contests and other events highlighting contested works. According to a report issued

in April, the most targeted books have included Maia Kobabe's graphic memoir about sexual identity, "Gender Queer," and Jonathan Evison's "Lawn Boy," a coming-of-age novel narrated by a young gay man. "We're seeing that trend continue in 2022, the criticism of books with LGBTQ subject matter," Caldwell-

Jones says, adding that books about racism such as Angie Thomas' novel "The Hate U Give" also are frequently challenged. Banned Books Weeks is overseen by a coalition of writing and free speech organizations, including the National Coalition Against Censorship, the Authors Guild and PEN America.

Associated Press

Conservative attacks against schools and libraries have proliferated nationwide over the past two years, and librarians themselves have been harassed and even driven out of their jobs. A middle school librarian in Denham Springs, Louisiana, has filed a legal complaint against a Facebook page which labeled her a "criminal and a pedophile." Voters in a western Michigan community, Jamestown Township, backed drastic cuts in the local library over objections to "Gender Queer" and other LGBTQ books.

Audrey Wilson-Youngblood, who in June quit her job as a library media specialist in the Keller Independent School District in Texas, laments what she calls the "erosion of the credibility and competency" in how her profession is viewed. At the Boundary County Library in Bonners Ferry, Idaho, library director Kimber Glidden resigned recently after months of harassment that included the shouting of Biblical passages referring to divine punishment □

'The Phantom of the Opera' to close on Broadway next year

By **MARK KENNEDY**
AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — "The Phantom of the Opera" — Broadway's longest-running show — is scheduled to close in February 2023, the biggest victim yet of the post-pandemic softening in theater attendance in New York.

The musical a fixture on Broadway since 1988, weathering recessions, war and cultural shifts will play its final performance on Broadway on Feb. 18, a spokesperson told The Associated Press on Friday. The closing will come less than a month after its 35th anniversary. It will conclude with an eye-popping 13,925 performances.

It is a costly musical to sustain, with elaborate sets and costumes as well as a

large cast and orchestra. Box office grosses have fluctuated since the show reopened after the pandemic — going as high as over \$1 million a week but also dropping to around \$850,000. Last week, it hit \$867,997 and producers may have seen the writing on the wall.

Based on a novel by Gaston Leroux, "Phantom" tells the story of a deformed composer who haunts the Paris Opera House and falls madly in love with an innocent young soprano, Christine. Andrew Lloyd Webber's lavish songs include "Masquerade," "Angel of Music," "All I Ask of You" and "The Music of the Night."

"As a producer you dream that a show will run forever. Indeed, my production of

Andrew's 'Cats' proudly declared for decades 'Now and Forever.' Yet 'Phantom' has surpassed that show's extraordinary Broadway run. But all shows do finally close," producer Cameron Mackintosh said in a statement.

The first production opened in London in 1986 and since then the show has been seen by more than 145 million people in 183 cities and performed in 17 languages over 70,000 performances. On Broadway alone, the musical has played more than 13,500 performances to 19 million people at The Majestic Theatre.

The closing of "Phantom" would mean the longest running show crown would go to "Chicago," which started in 1996. "The Lion King" is next, having begun

performances in 1997. Broadway took a pounding during the pandemic, with all theaters closed for more than 18 months. Some of the most popular shows "Hamilton," "The Lion King" and "Wicked"

have rebounded well, but other shows have struggled. Breaking even usually requires a steady stream of tourists, especially for "Phantom" and visitors to the city haven't returned to pre-pandemic levels. □



A poster advertising "The Phantom of the Opera," is displayed on the shuttered Majestic Theatre in New York, March 12, 2020.
Associated Press

Aces poised to capture multiple WNBA titles with Wilson, Gray

By **DOUG FEINBERG**
AP Basketball Writer

A'ja Wilson and the Las Vegas Aces look to be a safe bet to win a few more WNBA titles over the next several years, a realization that can't be ignored even though they haven't had very much time to celebrate their organization's first championship.

"I think we found ourselves in this league where everyone has their standard of how they've won, and we are creating that," Wilson said not long after the franchise won its first title on Sunday with a 78-71 victory against Connecticut in Game 4 of the WNBA Finals. "Our journey is just beginning."

The Aces have several of their core players signed to deals that will keep them in Las Vegas for the next few years. None is bigger than Wilson, who has already won two MVPs and is entering her prime at just 26 years old. She also was named defensive player of the year for the first time too this season and will be the centerpiece in which the Aces hope will be a title defense next year.

Las Vegas will be attempting to do something that



Las Vegas Aces' A'ja Wilson holds up the championship trophy as she celebrates with her team their win in the WNBA basketball finals against the Connecticut Sun, Sunday, Sept. 18, 2022, in Uncasville, Conn.

hasn't been done in the WNBA in 20 years. No team has won consecutive championships since the Los Angeles Sparks did it in 2001 and 2002.

"You see it. You see it," Wilson said. "This is what we're building. This is what we're doing. This is it. I'm so happy right now."

Wilson has been the face of the franchise since she was drafted No. 1 by the Aces

in 2018. She led the team to the WNBA Finals in 2020 before they were swept by Seattle.

Now she has a WNBA championship to go along with a NCAA title she won while starring for South Carolina as well as an Olympic gold medal.

Besides their MVP, other key players the Aces have signed for the next few seasons included WNBA Finals

MVP Chelsea Gray and backcourt mate Kelsey Plum.

"Knowing that we have commitment for next season is special," Gray said. "We're doing it for each other and it's created a bond."

That bond starts at the top with Las Vegas Aces owner Mark Davis. He's invested heavily in the team on and off the court since he

bought it in 2021. He lured Becky Hammon from the NBA by making her the first WNBA coach to have a \$1-million-a-year contract and is building a brand new practice facility.

"In Vegas, we are trying to build a culture that players want to come and take part in something special, something bigger than themselves," said Hammon, named coach of the year as she led the Aces to the title in her first year.

Hammon became the first rookie coach to win a WNBA championship.

She knows the history of the franchise, starring as a player from 2007-14. The team was swept in the 2008 WNBA Finals. Now the organization is celebrating a championship.

"I don't know, it's actually hard to put into words right now," Hammon said. "A little surreal. You know, when I took the job in December, I thought when I started kind of breaking down their rosters that I could do something with it. I had a vision of what I wanted to do with this team."

Hammon's vision culminated with a title this year and there could be more on the horizon. □

Associated Press

Fans prove timely, assist Broncos with play-clock countdown

By **PAT GRAHAM**
AP Sports Writer

DENVER (AP) — Russell Wilson didn't even need to glance at the play clock late in the fourth quarter of Denver's 16-9 win over Houston. The city's newest quarterback had the fans counting it down for him. The Broncos needed some help with their clock management again, and the crowd did its part on Sunday.

Fans chanted "5, 4, 3, 2, 1 ..." as if they were watching a basketball game. Wilson said he appreciated the crowd's assist on the late drive that ended with Brandon McManus' 50-yard field goal for the final margin.

"I guess that was helpful," Wilson said with a chuckle. "That was great our fans were into it."

Through a series of missed assignments and late-arriving play calls, the Broncos (1-1) used up all of their timeouts with more than seven minutes remaining in the fourth quarter. That included one when they didn't have enough men on the field for a punt return and that missing player happened to be rookie punt returner Montrell Washington.

The crowd went from booing the Broncos early on to shouting out timely reminders of the play clock. Running back Melvin Gordon said he'd never heard any-

thing quite like it.

"It was different," he said of the countdown. "I don't know if that's a good or bad thing or what it is, but let's see if they continue to do it."

Penalties are becoming a troubling trend for the Broncos under rookie coach Nathaniel Hackett. They led the league with a dozen infractions in their opener and among their 13 penalties for 100 yards against the Texans (0-1-1) were three false-start calls and two delay-of-game penalties. Those are typically uncommon at home.

"We're just going to have to be sure we evaluate everything, whether it's getting the personnel out there or

lack thereof and making sure the plays are coming in nice and clean," Hackett said. "We've just got to

keep talking about that. I'll talk with Russ, find out anything that I can do to help him make it better. □



Denver Broncos quarterback Russell Wilson (3) is pressured by Houston Texans defensive end Jonathan Greenard (52) during the second half of an NFL football game, Sunday, Sept. 18, 2022, in Denver.

Associated Press

62 and 700: Judge, Pujols closing in on home run milestones

By **NOAH TRISTER**
AP Baseball Writer

Aaron Judge and Albert Pujols could make this a milestone week for home runs.

Judge hit two more Sunday, raising his season total to 59, two shy of Roger Maris' American League record. Now the slugger returns to Yankee Stadium, where New York plays its next six games. Pujols, meanwhile, is somewhat improbably closing in on the 700-homer mark after hitting 12 since the start of August.

Judge's pursuit of Maris has stirred debate over how to put this AL record in context, should he break it. He's unlikely to threaten Barry Bonds' major league record of 73, but that mark, as well as the exploits of



New York Yankees' Aaron Judge hits his fifty eighth homerun during the third inning of a baseball game against the Milwaukee Brewers Sunday, Sept. 18, 2022, in Milwaukee.

Associated Press

Is it possible the Padres won't even make the play-offs after pulling off the blockbuster trade for Juan Soto? San Diego holds the second wild card in the National League at the moment, but the Padres are only a half-game ahead of Philadelphia and 2 1/2 ahead of Milwaukee.

San Diego is 24-20 since the start of August for a .545 winning percentage — after going 57-46 (.553) before that. Soto has hit only .221 since joining the Padres.

San Diego did win the last three games of a series with Arizona, with Soto hitting his first homer this month Sunday.

TRIVIA TIME

Who is the most recent player to lead the majors in home runs by double digits?

LINE OF THE WEEK

While Schwarber is second in the majors in home runs with 39, Houston's Yordan Alvarez is second to Judge in the AL with 37. He homered in his first three at-bats Friday night in the Astros' 5-0 victory over Oakland.

Honorable mention: In that same game, Justin Verlander came back from the injured list for Houston and threw five no-hit innings before being removed.

COMEBACK OF THE WEEK

It's actually a double dose this week.

On Tuesday night, Texas trailed Oakland 7-2 in the fifth inning before rallying for an 8-7 victory. Mark Mathias homered twice, including a solo shot in the ninth to win it. The Athletics had a 94.8% chance to win in the fifth inning, according to Baseball Savant.

The next night, the script was flipped. Oakland beat Texas 8-7 after the Rangers were up 5-1 after four. The win probability for Texas peaked at 93.2%. The A's completed their comeback with two runs in the top of the ninth, with the go-ahead run coming in on an error by shortstop Corey Seager.

TRIVIA ANSWER

Jose Bautista hit 54 home runs in 2010, finishing 12 ahead of Pujols. □

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Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa around the same time, have become complicated by performance-enhancing drug suspicions. There's one way in which Judge likely will surpass both Bonds and Maris, no matter how many more homers he hits. Right now, he has an incredible 20-homer lead over Kyle Schwarber, who is second in the majors. Nobody has led baseball in homers by at least 20 since Babe Ruth finished with 54 in 1928 and nobody else had more than 31.

Maris led the majors by only seven when he hit 61, and Bonds led by nine when he hit 73.

Judge is also in the mix for the AL Triple Crown — he's leading big in homers and RBIs and just one point behind batting leader Luis Arraez — but that won't sort itself out until closer to the end of the season.

The 42-year-old Pujols, who is retiring at the end of the season, is trying to become the fourth major leaguer to reach 700 homers, following Bonds, Hank Aaron and Ruth. Unlike Judge, he won't be going for his milestone at home this week. St. Louis' next eight games are on the road against the Padres, Dodgers and Brewers.

CUTTING IT CLOSE